Life in the Great Fighting Armies Under Two American Flags

Remarkable Revelation of the Romance and Tragedy of the Great War Which Is Now Passing Through Its Semi-Centennial Celebrations---Dramatic Picture of the Glamour of Army Life and the Horrors of the Battlefield.

BY FRANCIS TREVELYAN MILLER.

A MILLION dollars a day—this is the sum that was being expended in this country exactly fifty years ago to-day to maintain the great armies of the North on the battlefields of the Civil War. Moreover, this tremendous expenditure to keep the men fighting was maintained for nearly 1,500 days—frequently mounting as high as $4,000,000 a day.

Statisticians, who are making these investigations on this semi-centennial, state that this does not include the cost for armament or economic losses or destruction—but merely the daily "running expenses." War is, to a large extent, a business proposition. When reduced to figures it makes appalling revelations, and yet the Civil War was conducted on the most economical basis.

Soldiers, like all workmen, receive wages. The pay of the private in the Federal army was but $13 a month. On this payroll were hundreds of thousands of skilled mechanics—machinists, die-sinkers, inventors—whose wages at the bench, without endangering their lives, were more than that amount each week. Six men were willing to offer their services and their lives for the wages that but one alone was receiving at home. It can be truly said that "money" or "wages" is not the lure that causes men to rush to the battlefields in defense of their country.

Warriors Do Not Fight for Money.

Investigations in the South show that the pay in the Confederate army was even lower. It began with but $11 a month, and the need of funds to uphold the new government became so great that the soldiers were soon willing to fight without any pay whatever. Tens of thousands of planters and storekeepers, whose earnings were thousands of dollars a year in their pursuits of peace, risked their lives without wages. It is on record that many men served through the four years' of war without receiving a penny; others received a single dollar—and that was in Mexican money. Still this did not dampen their valor and there is not a record of any man leaving because he could not secure his wages.

The "wage" scale in war, however, is much the same as it is in industrial life. The "bosses" or military foremen and superintendents receive much larger wages—some of them, in fact, reach the proportion of salaries of corporation officers.

While thirteen dollars a month was the lowest wages paid in the Federal army, excepting the musicians, who received $1 less each month, the corporal was advanced a single dollar; the sergeant was rated at from $17 to $20, while the quartermaster-sergeant and sergeant-major received $21.

Good Salaries for the Military "Bosses."

The commissioned officer above the rank of sergeant was entitled to ration money, with which he was expected to purchase his own food and extras. The second lieutenant of artillery and infantry received $105 a month; the first lieutenant $110.50; captain, $120.50; major, $179; lieutenant-colonel, $198; and the colonel $222.

In the cavalry the wages were even larger; the lieutenants each receiving $129.83; the captain, $146.50; major, $189; lieutenant-colonel, $213; and the colonel $237. The difference is accounted by the fact that where the superior officers in the infantry were allowed three horses, the cavalry had six. The general officers received quite munificent salaries. A lieutenant-general received in all $778; a major-general, $477; the brigadier-general, $329.50.

The business system of war is operated like that of a great factory; and there are disbursing agents and departments—every detail is systematized to secure the most economical results. The private in the Federal army received his soldier's outfit; it cost the government $43.25 a year for each man, and consisted of one uniform hat, a forage cap, three pairs of trousers, an overcoat that must last for five years, a uniform coat, two sack coats, three flannel shirts, three pairs of drawers, four pairs of "brogans" (shoes), and two blankets that must serve the soldier for five years. The musket or the tools of warfare, furnished each soldier cost the government $14.93 equipped with all appendages, such as bayonet and ramrod.

What It Cost the Government to Feed the Army.

It is interesting in this day of high prices of foodstuffs to review the prices the government paid for food for its army, and the variety served in days of war. The official records at Washington give these figures: Pork cost $19 a barrel; beef, $15; beef tongues (seldom seen in the mess of the private), $16; bacon, 10 cents a pound; hams, 12 cents a pound; flour, $7.50 a barrel; hard bread, 4 cents a pound; beans (the soldiers' mainstay), $2 a bushel; rice, 7 cents a pound; hominy, 2 1-2 cents; coffee, 20 cents; tea, 50 cents; sugar, 8 cents; dessicated potatoes, 11 cents; dessicated mixed vegetables, 24 cents; pickles, $3.75 a keg; dried apples, 5 cents a pound; split peas, $2 a bushel; molasses, 32 cents per gallon; potatoes, 60 cents a bushel.

An idea of the magnitude of business conducted by the government can be gained from the startling figures representing the receipts of food supplies for a single week at the Washington depots in 1861. The records show there were received a half ton of pork, two tons of beef and beef tongues, thirty-eight tons of bacon, 300 barrels of flour, 175 tons of hard bread, 110 tons of beans, seventeen tons of rice, 500 bushels of hominy, ten tons of riced barley, 125 tons of coffee, a ton of tea, 375 tons of sugar, 9,000 gallons of vinegar, seventeen tons of candles, forty tons of soap, four tons of dessicated potatoes, five tons of dessicated vegetables, fifteen tons of dried apples, 1,000 bushels of peas, ninety tons of potatoes, and 5,000 gallons of molasses.

Unfortunately the records of the Confederacy are not in existence on this semi-centennial. Their historical value would be tremendous if they could be found, but it is now well known that they were burned with the passing of the romantic old government, whose struggle against almost overwhelming difficulties astounded the world. Its governmental departments were conducted by able men, who secured remarkable results from the smaller armies and more limited funds at their command. There are many instances where soldiers fought not only without pay, but in the face of starvation; and whole regiments went into battle without guns, relying upon the dead for their arms. The greatest admiration for the fighting grit of the soldiers on this anniversary comes from their former foes.

Religion and the Trade of War.

The trade of war does not forget religious devotion and the principles of brotherhood. Every fighting army maintains it faith in a Divine power. There were more than 3,000 chaplains on the firing line of the Civil War, Each regiment, North and South, was not considered equipped until it had enrolled a spiritual director. The duties of these chaplains were multitudinous, and were, in most cases, rendered without wages. It was the duty of the chaplain to care for the morals of his charges, to cheer up the wounded in camp and to write letters for the sick, and to hold religious services among a hundred other similar duties. The spirit of religion was manifested in the Army of Northern Virginia. It was especially so in the corps of "Stonewall" Jackson, who, it is reported, always took council with his Maker before entering into battle.

One of the most remarkable sights on a battlefield occurred at Gettysburg. The Federal brigade stood ready to go into battle at the centre of the line where the fiercest volleys were sweeping. It had scarcely moved when Father Corby, a Catholic chaplain, halted the thousands of men, and, even while the shells fell about him, motioned to the brigade to kneel. Standing on a rock, the father rendered absolution to the troops according to the rites of the Catholic Church. Then the brigade moved forward into the thick of the battle at the "Loop."

Soldiers Build Church on Battle-Line.

In the camp the chaplains' altar consisted on any improvement at hand—sometimes a tent was the edifice—more often the open air—and an upturned barrel served as an altar. The most unique house of worship was that built by the Fiftieth New York Engineers while campaigning before Petersburg, in 1864-65. It was just such a church as can be found in smal communities. It was built of logs, and had a central spire that showed great architectual skill, and which towered high above the surrounding tents and log huts. Here, regardless of religious denominations, the rank and file gathered to listen to some touching sermons. One of the best known of these Catholic chaplains to-day stands high in the church. It is Archbishop Ireland, who went to the front with the Fifth Minnesota Regiment at the age of twenty-three years.

Post-Offices in Great Fighting Armies.

A practical rural delivery system was in practice in the Civil War. The executives of war have found that one of the most important matters to keep the soldiers in good humor, and thus in good fighting trim, is to receive and distribute his personal mail promptly, [illegible] the troops may be. The Confederate government at Richmond exhausted every possible channel to distribute its mail as promptly as possible.

The multitude of letters that entered the Washington post-office in the first days of the war became so great that the officials were in despair—until Postmaster William B. Haslett directed his attention to the difficulty. Through him a system was evolved. Letters were to be directed to the soldier, giving the number of the army corps to which he belonged, brigade, regiment and company. Thus the letters were divided at the central post-offices into pouches labelled with the corps number. These, in turn, at the headquarters of the corps, were separated into pouches for each division or brigade, and these into regiments. Again they were divided among the companies, and then a regularly appointed mail carrier went among the members of the company delivering his mail much like the carrier in a city.

The soldier's letter to his home followed back over the same route, he carrying the missive to the company office, where he could also purchase writing material. So well organized was this system that Sherman's troops, after having been hidden in the State of Georgia on the march to the sea for several weeks, with their exact destination practically unknown, received their mail, even before food, from transports in the harbor of Savannah.

When "Not at Work" on the Firing-Line.

With three million men drawn away from the pursuits of business and thrown into the trade of war, life in the armies, when not "at work" in battle, assumed many of the forms of every-day life in peaceful communities. There were newsdealers, stationers, money-lenders, grog-sellers, tobacco merchants, watch repairers, and various other business enterprises connected with the armies.

The country merchant follows the armies, as keen for a good trade as when "back at home." Here, at the sutler's, the soldier can buy those little luxuries to which he was accustomed, but of which the army regulations take no recognition—pies, cards, writing paper, collars and ties—in fact, most anything the average small town supplies. But the soldier, in most cases, had to pay an exhorbitant price for them. To many the row of log huts, or tents, or sometimes just covered wagons, bearing the legend "Sutler" became known as "Robbers' Row."

War, however, is not a lucrative occupation, and the soldier seldom has ready money in his pocket; but this obstacle to a transaction was overcome by the soldier signing a slip, which the sutler presented to the paymaster when the pay was being distributed. The offerings of the sutler held such a lure for many soldiers that it was frequently the case that a soldier had no money coming to him after the sutler had collected from the paymaster.

The story is told of a number of soldiers who overcame the difficulty of obtaining supplies without money or credit. A group collected in front of a sutler's wagon and dickered over the price of shirts. Meanwhile, another soldier crept to the tail board of the wagon where a hogshead of molasses stood. With a bayonet he drilled a hole in the barrel, and then filled a number of canteens with the fluid. His retreat was the signal for the ending of the parley in the front, and barterers left without purchasing. A few moments later there was uproar in camp. The colonel and sutler were making a search of tents for the culprit. But it was in vain, for the soldiers found ingenious means of hiding things so that it was impossible to unearth them.

Skilled Laborers Who Make War Possible.

An interesting phase of army life is the laborer who wins or loses battles at the forge or in the ship. There were over 5,000 farriers in the cavalry service of the Civil War, in both the Federal and Confederate armies. These men were of the utmost importance. Without them a cavalry company would soon be without horses, for it is the farrier that acts as veterinary sergeon as well as shoeing, or directs assistants in the art of shoeing horses. The farrier is a regularly enlisted trooper and must show his credentials for such an important position before acceptance. He ranks next to a second lieutenant in pay.

The farrier, with his portable forge and bellows, followed close behind the troopers on the march. His busiest time came when a camp was built—then nearly every horse had to be looked over and by him was either condemned for future service or doctored up for the march.

On the outskirts of Washington occurred a scene of activity in August, 1863, that seldom has been seen near that city. Over 5,000 men were suddenly set to work erecting stables, hospitals and dwellings and other buildings for the housing of Federal horses and troopers. Within three months the buildings were complete and covered an area of 625 acres, for which the government paid an annual rental of $1,000. The estimated cost of this tremendous cavalry depot was $1,225,000. The buildings were increased and a few months later could house 30,000 animals; the hospitals had accomadations for 2,650 horses, while thirty-two gindies besides gave shelter for 6,000 more.

This was but one—though the largest—of the six cavalry depots for curing sick horses, and for remounting troops. The others were at St. Louis, Greenville, La., Nashville, Harrisburg, Pa., and Wilmington, Del. The St. Louis depot covered 400 acres and employed 1,1000 workers—farriers, smiths, carpenters, wagon-makers, wheelwrights, teamsters, and other laborers.

How Gigantic Armies Are Fed.

It takes all kinds of people to make a war; the moment on the firing line is but one of the events of a day's work. Equally as important as the cannoneer is the cook. His is an exalted position by virtue of the meals he prepares. After a morning's drill in the sharp, bracing air the men hang around the kettle and fires. The cook was a superior personage in the Civil War. In some cases it was hardly necessary for this dignitary to beat upon the bottom of a pan—as was the custom in most regiments—to call the men to dinner; they knew when the last operation had been performed and were already clamoring for rations.

A formality that came into camp at the beginning in the North was "soup tasting." An officer of each company was delegated to this important task. Surrounded by eager men, the officer solemnly filled a mug with soup and tasted it. He was the court of last resort on the question whether or not the soup was strong enough to pass muster. The custom soon disappeared, when the officers found they had enough to do without this honor, and that the soldiers were fairly good judges of soup themselves. Not only the custom, but the soup itself disappeared, except from hospital fare.

The regiments in the Civil War divided into messes. There were generally four men in each mess. The duty of securing the rations from the commissary was performed by one of the men; another acted as cook, while the other two busied themselves as assistants to serve the food and to wash dishes and clean up. In the Confederate army this rule was at first adopted. The Southerners, however, after the first year seldom found it possible to maintain such a system, as "duty" not food became paramount.

The feeding of the armies was one of the most serious phases in the war. Hardtack soon became a staple product. The great provision trains were less regular. War ettled down to a more gruesome trade. Armies slept on their arms in the beating rain. Frequently they awakened with a huge blanket of snow drawn over them. Training schools, like apprentice shops, were established to teach men the trade of war—a trade which appeals to the imagination as the most romantic, but which in reality is the most morbid and horrible of all human vocations.

Most Morbid Trade in the World.

It was a distinct shock to a majority of the volunteers in both armies of the Civil War when they entered into the actual trade of war. Fresh from homes where their every want was filled by a mother, a sister or wife, they now found that what they had must be wrought by their own hands. First they must erect their own quarters—tents in the North—out of a pile of snow-white canvas huge piles of lumber and cordage. Floors must be laid in the tents, drains dug to make their quarters sanitary. They must do their own laundry work; many volunteers who brought trunks full of fine linen shirts soon tossed the finery behind the first convenient bush. At home the butcher brought meat to the door—in camp they must slaughter their own cattle. They chopped wood, lugged water, and performed the hundred other duties of a household.

Many veterans still living to-day can recall their introduction to the military word "discipline." One private in a Massachusetts regiment, while drilling before marching to the front, and who had been a neighbor of the commander of the regiment, could not understand the sudden exaltedness of the officer nor the necessity of so much drilling.

"Let's stop this fooling, and go over to the grocery," he remarked jovially.

The officer's reply was addressed to a corporal:

"Corporal, take this man out and drill him like h——."

And the corporal did. Many more lessons were required to teach the soldier that suggestions to officers from the ranks were not appreciated nor tolerated; but he did learn and became a banner private before many months had passed.

America Is Not a Fighting Nation.

It is a tremendous task to transform a great, industrious, peaceful people into fighting forces. The Americans are not and never can be, according to their form of government, a military people. An incident which truly characterizes the attitude of the average American was told a few days ago in Richmond by a former Confederate officer. It occurred when General Wigfall first brought his Texans to Virginia. One of his men was seated by the side of some baled hay, smoking his pipe. As Wigfall and another general passed, the latter made a satirical remark regarding the discipline of Texans. Wigfall addressed the soldier:

"What are you doing here, my man?"

"Nothin' much," replied the sentry; "jest kinder takin' care o' this hyar stuff."

"Do you know who I am, sir?" asked the general.

"Wall, now, 'pears like I know your face, but I can't jes' call your name—who are you?"

"I'm General Wigfall!" ejaculated the inquisitor.

The words failed in their expected result; instead of leaping to his feet, removing the pipe from his mouth, and stiffly saluting—as this same soldier would do within a few months when discipline had him in its grip—the sentry extended his hand and drawled:

"Glo'ral, I'm pleased to meet you—my name's Jones."

The bane of a raw recruit's first weeks in camp is drilling. The first thing in the morning on awaking is a drill; and the last thing at night is drill. At the first light of day the rattle of drum and the piping of fifes awakes the soldier to his day's work. The awkward squad is weaned from the "veterans," and marched to a smooth piece of ground where the sergeant puts them through their paces, according to the manual of arms. Then comes cleaning up—"policing" of company streets and sprucing up the tents. This done to the satisfaction of an inspecting officer, the ever welcome breakfast call sounds, and always a rush for the mess tables immediately follows.

Glamour of War Without the Blood of Battle.

War is deceptive—it has many sides. Its "panoplied grandeur" is not all fiction; it has its dress parade and its pageants.

In gorgeous uniforms, the regimental band marches to the parade ground, its stirring martial music floats through the camp. It is guard mount. The various details come in all their shining brasses and accurtrements; they form while the officer of the day tallies the men with his list of the detail. Then the gentries march away to relieve the sentinels who have been on duty.

Later in the morning the whole regiment forms on the colors. The field officers, astride prancing steeds, come to the front of the long lines. The regiment starts in motion, and for two or three hours is put through a gruelling drill. At first there is much confusion—even many of the officers do not accurately know their rules, and can be seen furtively peeping into a book before ordering a manoeuvre.

An Arkansas cavalry officer in the Civil War did not know the military order for a certain manouvre, but he did know how to achieve the same result in an original, businesslike manner. His troops stood "to horse," as the officer, puzzled for a moment over the next order, hesitated. Smiles appeared on the faces of his men. Suddenly, with a look of disgust, he cried:

"Prepare to git onto your critters."

"Git!"

Sports of the Soldiers Between the Battles.

The life of the soldier is not all dull care—he has his games and pleasures to keep up his spirits, and these are encouraged by the officers. Card-playing is perhaps the most popular pasttime. Poker, of course, ranks first, and in the Civil War it was a common sight to see groups of a dozen or more men seated about a half-barrel, serving as a table, wagering their meagre wages on the turn of the cards. The game was even carried to the battle line. The Fifth New York Cavalry officers, just before the bugle-call sounded to send Major Keenan and many others to their death in the Wilderness at Chancellorsville, were seated on the ground playing poker, when the roar of battle sounded on all sides of them.

It is told that Confederate and Federal officers frequently met in a neutral town or village between the lines and spent the night in playing cards. In the Southern armies "seven-up" and "vinge-et-un" were popular.

Men on furlough from the Army of the Potomac came to camp with tales of a new game that had the North in its grip—it was baseball. A game was played between Keerny's Jersey brigade and Bartlett's brigade. While Grant's army was in front of Petersburg, in 1864, the Thirteenth New Artillery boasted the championship team of footballists. Boxing also became popular and many spirited bouts were held.

Another diversion from the stern game of war was cockfighting. This was practiced in both armies, and frequently large sums of money changed hands between the bettors.

Championship Contests for Sporting Records.

A sport that was peculiar to the Georgia troops alone was "gander pulling." It was a game in which the cavalry alone participated. A gander, who's head and neck had been liberally greased, and was left hanging by the feet from a tree limb, while a mounted cavalier rode forward at a gallop to pull the folw from its position. By the tree stood a soldier with a switch in hand which fell over the horse just as the rider reached for the squirming head.

The result was ludicrous. The rider forgot the greased gander and clutched the pommel to retain his seat. It is a very difficult feat, as many soldiers who read these lines can testify. Sums of money were ventured, and frequently a man was left with no "shinplasters"—as the Confederate termed his bills—for months.

In the cavalry there were means of recreations which were not open to the infantry. Horse racing was one of these sports, and the events often reached the dignity of a professional race meet. With the opening of spring, the owners of speedy mounts began grooming and training the horses for St. Patrick's Day, the "Derby" of the Army of the Potomac. When the army was at Washington, great grandstands were erected, and a racing course laid out. When the army had a holiday the stands were filled with spectators. There were running races, hurdles, and cavalry manoeuvres by picked squads. It was one of the most memorable days that linger in the memories of the veterans. Another cavalry passtime was "quoit pitching," horse shoes and pickets pins furnishing the material.

Blanket-Tossing Is a Stern Fact.

Many veterans remember their initiation into camp. Blanket-tossing—in which the new arrival is forcibly placed and repeatedly tossed by the men who held the blanket—is common in all armies.

Then there is the practical joker: he is the same in war as he is in peace. An incident of this nature occurred in which the embyro soldier was nearly killed. He was a member of a cavalry regiment, and the practical joker of the camp informed him that he might select any horse in the stable for his own. The novice picked out a splendid mount—it was the colonel's—and was then ordered to inform the colonel of his choice. The recruit mounted the steed and cantered up to the tent. He dismounted unconcernedly, despite the amazement that was gathering over the colonel's face.

"Colonel," he said, "this horse just suits me, I think I will ride him while in the service."

The officer tried to express himself but failed. His anger overcame him and he jerked his pistol from the holster. The recruit realized that something was wrong. Sliding to the side of the animal, in Indian fashion, he spurred the horse away from the danger zone. The colonel found his tongue, and his angered tones thundered after the fugitive:

"Arrest that man!"

The Practical Joker in the Armies.

The practical joker returned with the culprit, ready to clear him of any difficulty. But in the meantime the colonel had recovered his equilibrium. He questioned the trooper for the name of the soldier who had put him up to the joke. The recruit said he did not know.

"Would you know the man if you saw him again?" asked the officer.

"Yes sir," responded the recruit.

The regiment was lined up. Down the line of men passed the recruit and colonel. The guilty man was passed by without a sign of recognition. The man could not be found.

"I can't point him out to you, sir," announced the raw recruit.

The regiment was dismissed, and the colonel remarked how close to death the recruit has been.

"A moment more and you would have been shot,"—and then excused him for the offense. The recruit became one of the most popular men of the regiment for his act in shielding the hazer. Needless to say the colonel's horse was in the future exempt from the list of possibilities in the hazing line.

And This Is—The Other Side of War.

Of such is life in the army—and of such were the experiences of citizen soldiery on the battle-lines in the American Civil War just fifty years ago to-day. Then, suddenly, all is changed. O God! what a spectacle. In the moment of jocularity the demon of war flashes its sword and drives it through the heart of his brother; the guns roar from the fighting lines; there is a clash of steel and a flash of flame. The earth trembles under the thunderous roar of the cannon. Shrieks of men can be heard above the tumult. Earth and sky seem to crash together in one awful convulsion; streams of blood flow through the blinding smoke. Thousands of brave men—mechanics, storekeepers, lawyers—fathers, sons, brothers, who but a few moments before were writing jovial letters to the loved ones at home, or laughing over the games with their comrades, clutch at their hearts and fall to the ground drenched in their own life blood—the horror of the tragedy written on their faces. This is war! How long is civilization to stand aside and let it ravage humanity.